

# American Grafters in Paris Find Their Fellow Countrymen Easy Marks

Beggars, Panhandlers and All Sorts of "Borrowers" Always Ready with Tales of Woe for Yankee Ears.

By Stephen Allen Reynolds.

ALONG the boulevards between the Madeleine and the Place de la République, along the Champs Elysees from the Arch to the Obelisk, in little brasseries along the Seine, in the so-called "American bars" of the Opéra quarter, in the pastry shops along the Rue du Faubourg St. Honoré, at the prix fixe tables along the Boulevard des Capucines, in fact, in almost any of the twenty arrondissements within the fifty-six gates of the French capital, will be found the ubiquitous American grafter.

Attracted to you by either the American roll to the brim of your derby or your Brooklyn-made shoe, he will unerringly single you out as a fellow countryman abroad on pleasure bent, therefore fish for his net. He may be working on one of the three commoner "lays"—the "touch," the "loan" or the "guide." In other words, he may brazenly ask you for a small sum of money with which he may obtain food or lodging, he may tell you a hard luck story

knows all the ropes. What do you say? Will we start now? Who could refuse such an invitation? Not the average American tourist upon his first visit. True, with the aid of a guidebook he might find his way to the Louvre. His boarding school French might even serve to get him to Versailles or extraordinary expenditure. But nearly all American visitors, both male and female, desire for once in their lives to witness the far famed near-naughtiness of Paris at first hand, and that is where the guide comes in.

Not so, however, with the great majority. Male and female alike clamor for the Moulin Rouge, the Bal Tabarin, the Abbaye, Maxim's, the Tavern of the Red Ass, the Rat Mort and other resorts of lesser repute. They seek to comb the narrow streets of the Latin Quarter that they may see Bohemia with their own eyes. They are anxious to buy wine at the Dome for models who sometimes pose; they do not rest until they have visited the Bal Bullier,



"THIS FELLOW IS ON THE LEVEL WITH HIS CHARGES."

famous on five continents. Hence the guide—for it is an easier matter for a multi-millionaire to get by St. Peter than for an "untested" stranger to find some of these establishments.

When an obliging young man offers to show you around town without any expense to yourself, what is more natural than for you to accept such a kind offer, particularly when the guide is a countryman from your own town? It is the old story of looking for something in return for nothing, the basic principle of every crook's game, and get-rich-quick game ever devised since Adam threw away the core of the memorable apple.

Having accepted the gratuitous offer of the American guide you map out a tour for the afternoon and evening, we will say. Singularly enough, your guide is not satisfied with the first cocher who cracks his whip and solicits your patronage—he needs must go down the line and pick out a certain driver.

"This fellow's on the level with his charges," the guide explains as you drive off. "I know him for a square cocher. Some of the others would most likely drive you off into some side street where the Apaches would hold you up and split with him."

Having arrived at your destination by a more or less circuitous route you pay the driver a sum which seems cheap when compared with a drive of the same length in the states, and yet it is usually twice or three times the amount of the legal fare. You notice that the guide seems to be very friendly with the driver and that when you dismiss the cabby he shakes hands with the guide. Indeed, this handshaking continues throughout the entire evening, for no matter where you stop to drink or eat or gaze the proprietors always shake hands with the guide—invariably at the moment you take leave.

It seems quite unnecessary to add that from the moment you enter a resort a careful account is kept of your expenditures, and at the moment of your leaving a commission varying from 20 per cent to 50 per cent passes from one palm to another. It is usually 50 per cent in the resorts which appeal to the inner man, as well as at the show places and cabarets of Montmartre.

Even should you venture into a place where your guide is personally unknown to the management he still obtains his commission, for when you enter his first move is to whisper to the proprietor or manager these four magic words: "Je suis l'interprète." The commission is added to the price, and rare, indeed, are the shops or resorts which do not make it "worth while" for the man who accompanies you.

Indeed, some of these self-styled "interpreter guides" have been residents of Paris for such short space that their French vocabulary is practically limited to those four words. It seems all that is necessary in order to obtain the commission, for the shopkeepers and resort managers of Paris are clever enough to realize that any guide who brings them business must be rewarded whether or not he has mastered their language.

The fact of the matter is that he has

been driven all over the city at your expense, he has lunched and dined with you, to say nothing of the midnight bite at the Café Weber; and if you have spent the sum of 20 francs during the afternoon and evening you may rest assured that gold and silver amounting to some 80 or 100 francs—once yours—is safe in one of the pockets of the guide's fashionably cut trousers.

It was once the privilege of the writer to listen to the abominable inspired confidences of a number of American "guides" and panhandlers. A young man wearing a frock coat and well ironed silk topper approached the table and begged for the privilege of a few words with me. His linen was spotless—his story seemed flawless. He had, so he said, been robbed in Montmartre while seeing the town a few nights before. He had called for funds, but a heartless landlord had locked up his ten suits of clothing and turned him into the street. Would I kindly come to his relief with a small loan for a few days until the arrival of his draft? He exhibited a typewritten cable message which looked promising, and the tears came to my eyes as I thought of his predicament and overpowered my caution.

"I'm sorry I can't help you out," I told him. "You see, this happens to be my third visit to Paris, and I've heard all about these heartless landlords and delayed drafts before. Those sleeve buttons of yours ought to fetch enough at the Mont de Piété to tide you over for a few days should you be on the level."

The man in the frock coat was about to sink away when I asked him to join me and have an apéritif. Over an absinthe-sauce he waxed confidential and told me his story.

"You're wise," said he, as he surveyed the equivalent contents of his glass. "There sure is a bunch of American grafters over

here having a pretty soft time. I've only been over here two months, but some of the push have been here for years."

He helped himself to my cigarettes and continued: "Paris is a cheap place to live in. A perfect dinner costs very little. The rent of a nice room is about half what you have to pay in New York, less than that once you can speak French and know how to make a bargain. Clothing of the best sort can be had for a song, and a two-horse carriage can be hired for about twice the price of a carfare in the States."

"Skins are good during the tourist season, and the only kick that the boys have is on the French shoes and cigarettes. Several of the bunch import their own smokes. Of course, the favorite graft is the American tourist. He always has money, and is over here to spend it and have a good time. If we spin a good yarn about hard luck it's pretty easy to make a 'touch' for a lous, and 'most any New Yorker will fall for a five-franc piece.' 'I used to keep a set of books in Cleveland,' another American grafter told me over a glass of Algerian 'Bordeaux' in a little brasserie in the Rue Vignon. 'I'd saved a bit of money and felt too strong to push a pen any longer, so I came over here to take in the sights. I went broke the third day after my arrival, and as I found so many people willing to help me I've stayed here ever since. Paris is all right

Most Prosperous of All Is the "Guide" Who Shares Liberally in the Exploitation of His Companion.

after you've lived here awhile and know the ropes. I'm here going on seven years now, and I expect to live here the rest of my life."

"When I first went broke I hardly knew what to do until I met a wise American who had lived in Paris ever since the fair. He told me what to do, and I followed his instructions. First I went to the American Relief Society in the Rue du Faubourg St. Honoré. They put my name on their payroll and gave me 15 francs a week for nearly six months; then they offered me a chance to work my way back to the States on an American ship out of Cherbourg. I refused, of course, and that cut me off from the society."

"In the meantime I got hold of a list of names and addresses of persons who were good for an occasional 'touch.' One of 'em was the American wife of a French banker. She coughed up a lous every fortnight as regular as clockwork. Another grouchy old American who lives here most of the time used to swear at me every time I called



NEARLY ALL AMERICANS DESIRE, FOR ONCE IN THEIR LIVES TO WITNESS THE FAR-FAMED NEAR-NAUGHTINESS OF PARIS.

THE BAL BULLIER.

about a mythical delayed draft and ask you for a loan to tide him over, or he may offer to guide you around and about Paris at so much an hour or a day.

Grafters working the "touch" plan are easily got rid of. A small piece of silver and a decided refusal to give more will usually suffice to send them on their way, although your name and temporary address will be passed around sooner or later, together with a "tip" as to the amount you gave the first begging countryman.

The pleas of those after a "loan" are in many cases both heartrending and plausible. A cable message is often displayed which may read: "Sorry delay. Draft for thousand first mail." Who could refuse a clean-cut young fellow from Milwaukee after he had told you of the clothing locked up at his hotel, of two sleepless nights passed in walking the streets of Paris? With tears in his eyes he assures you that not a morsel of food has he swallowed in eight and forty hours; then he exhibits the cable message, and you part with 50 or 100 francs—never to see it again. Should you lay eyes on the man from Milwaukee again like as not you will see him at a table in the Café Weber. His party may be drinking Chamberlain of 1906 and smoking Vizier Hongroise cigarettes at a franc the package. "Bordeaux" from Algeria and ordinary smokes from the Dépôt des Tabacs next door may be the best that you feel you can afford, and yet, should you have the effrontery to call the gentleman from Milwaukee to one side and whisper in his ear that he should have long since received the delayed remittance and kept his promise to you, it is more than likely that he will laugh in your face. In all probability the cable message shown you was used to good advantage upon others as well as yourself. Blanks may be had for the asking, and the public typewriters serve to fill them out. Thus, the cable messages never get "dog eared," nor are they ever out of date.

The beggars are a nuisance, the horrors are a pest, but the so-called American "guides" of the great French city are most unquestionably the worst of the lot. In that their dealings with American visitors, while apparently straightforward, are as crooked as the proverbial ram's horn. Graft, under a thousand different cloaks, enters into their propositions. They toll not, nor do they spin, yet few tourists eat better food, drink better wine or wear more fashionable attire than do these buccannery of the boulevards.

They pounce upon you as you leave your train at the Gare St. Lazare; they scan the columns of the newspapers for the names and addresses of the newly arrived Americans; they haunt the vicinages of the Grand Hotel; they hail you as you leave the Crédit Lyonnais after cashing a draft; but possibly of all places their favorite stamping ground is along the northern side of the Boulevard des Capucines. Here, upon every hand, particularly during the late afternoon and evening, you will encounter the American "guide" airily swinging his rattan stick, his shifty eyes looking for the telltale American derby.

Naturally, if it be your first visit to Paris, you desire to see all Paris, both before and after dark. He will help you. You hail with delight the coming of the interpreter-guide who speaks your language, for are not the sights and mysteries of Paris as an open book to him?

His rates are only a lous a day and expenses, but even this sum can be shaded should you plead your inability to afford that sum. Should you be unable to afford a half lous, or even a measly five-franc piece, it is more than likely that the guide will swoon, gaze up and down the boulevard, and then deliver himself substantially as follows:

"Well, I'm sorry. Times are pretty slow over here and I'm not very busy. But look here—I'll tell you what I'll do: I've nothing on to-day or to-night, and seeing that you're from Little Old New York—my home town—I'll show you around for nothing. Just for the sake of passing away the time. You pay the cab fares, the lunch, the supper, and I'll show you everything that's to be seen. I'll save you money and keep you from being skinned. It'll cost you less if I take you around than if you try to get around alone—and take it from me, the Apaches are pretty bad this year and it isn't safe for an outsider to pike around Montmartre without a guide who



DROOPING YOUNG WOMAN—OH! WHAT SHALL I DO? I AM ALMOST CRAZY WITH MY WORRIES. THOROUGHGOING FEMINIST—TAKE IT ALL TO THE LORD, DEAR. SHE'LL HELP YOU.

upon him at his hotel, but I didn't mind that, for after calling me down good and hard he'd always wind up by tossing me a gold coin.

"Between the addresses and the American Society I had enough money to live nicely, but as I wanted extra spending money and fine togs I turned guide. Of course, in those days I didn't know the Louvre from the morgue, and I found out I didn't have to make good. I was very slow at picking up the language, too, but all I needed was a few friends among the cabbies and the French words: 'Je suis l'interprète.' That's all any guide needs to know to start in with. After that he can pick up the language as he goes along. Any man that goes broke over here can learn the city in three days—that is, all the places that the American tourists want to see."

"It gets a little slow here in the summer time," a third "guide" confessed to me over a grenadine-au-kirsch in front of the Café de la Paix.

"But we follow the crowd to Trouville, Aix-les-Bains, and so forth, and 'touch' the rich Americans and English people for our expenses. Possibly half of the boys stay right here and work the summer visitors. They don't have as much money to spend as the people who come here during the season have, but there's always enough doing to pay expenses and have a bit left over to blow in."

"Suppose an American went to the consul general?" I ventured. "A bona fide case of distress. What would he do?"

"He'd most likely have him thrown out of his office," laughed the man from Los Angeles. "I've heard that he said that if he sent every one back home that asked him he'd have to charter the Mauretania or the 'Lucy.' He wouldn't listen to a man for a minute. He wouldn't pay a Vassar graduate's bus fare. In the first place, the United States has no relief fund for distressed citizens stranded abroad. You've got to be a shipwrecked sailor in order to interest any consul. In the second place, the consuls all along the line from St. Petersburg to Liverpool have been worked to a standstill by all kinds of bums and sharks."

"In the third place, the consul general at Paris is particularly sore on American grafters on account of a trick played on the old consul general just before the fair. A 'guy' came over here with a forged letter of introduction to him from a United States Senator. He was taken right into the general's home and treated like a member of the family. The second day he borrowed 2,000 francs from the general, got drunk and insulted the women of the family. Since that time there's nothing doing at the building on the Avenue de l'Opéra, and I don't blame the new consul general at all. The 'guy' was too fresh, and through his coarse work a lot of decent people who've gone 'broke' over here have suffered."

Some of the "guides" present a smart appearance and occupy luxurious quarters. Even at that they are spending less than they "earn" and are saving for the rainy days to come. Others are satisfied with a cot in some cheap garret. They are not so bold as the first-described, or, possibly absinthe or Amer Picon is responsible for their mode of living. Like society, the American guides and panhandlers of Paris have their cliques and castes, and a great gulf separates the dressy man with the rattan stick from the shivering vagabond who tugs at your coat sleeve and whispers that he knows where absinthe can be obtained for three sous.

But as to the guide generally speaking, they know nothing of French history, yet they know the route to Versailles; they know nothing of art, yet they will conduct you to the Louvre and advise you to purchase a catalogue; they pose as interpreters, yet most of them know less than forty French words. But they do know the shopkeepers who pay the largest commission, the near-naughty resorts of Montmartre, and more or less about the moult garrets and garish dance halls of the Quartier Latin—and there we will leave them.

WRONG KIND OF FORGETTING.

She—Don't Mr. Briggs and his wife ever forget their differences? He—Why, yes, in a way. He forgets that he is a gentleman and she forgets that she is a lady.—Boston Transcript.